Net Environmental Benefit Analysis Decision-Making Tool

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Net Environmental Benefit Analysis (NEBA) is a resource management tool designed to improve the quality and results of environmental decision making. NEBA is a consensus-based process that brings natural resource science together with the reality of resource management decision making. When applied, it provides a means for considering proposed environmental actions, comparing and contrasting the trade-offs and environmental considerations of those actions, and then prioritizing the outcomes through a risk-ranking exercise. When used by natural resource scientists and resource management decision makers, the NEBA process creates an open, honest dialogue of the capabilities and limitations inherent in resource management and the decision-making tradeoffs faced by resource managers today.

NEBA has been used extensively in Region 9 in emergency planning to assist decision making during a response. Environmental issues are often too complex to work through in the time frame of an emergency. This session will present a process that has been developed and used to break down the complex issues involved, thus enabling the decision makers to incorporate environmental concerns into response quickly without sacrificing good science. This process can be used in both freshwater and marine environments. Although the decisions for EPA differ in these two situations, the decision maker is provided with the best information available, based on a consensus process. This allows the decision maker to weigh the environmental concerns, public safety, response capabilities, and political influence, whereas previously the environmental concerns were diffuse and often not scientifically based.

Session attendees should leave with (1) a clear understanding of the NEBA process, (2) examples of how it has been and can be used in various situations and areas of the country, and (3) the tools and resources to apply the process to their own environmental management decision-making areas of interest.

Bill Robberson, EPA R9, and Ann Whelan, EPA Region 5, will jointly lead the discussion. Mr. Robberson has been with EPA for 17 years and helped create the NEBA process as we know it today. Bill currently coordinates the activities of Regional Response Team IX, a group of 16 Federal Agencies and State representatives that develops and implements response policies and directly supports emergency response. Ms. Whelan has been with EPA for nine years and previously worked for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. She currently works to enhance emergency response by better preparedness in a number of different venues, including the Regional Response Team and Area Committees, and conducts training for State and local officials.